May 2009

Still horsing around in Ypsilanti

100% FREE *RAG* CONTENT

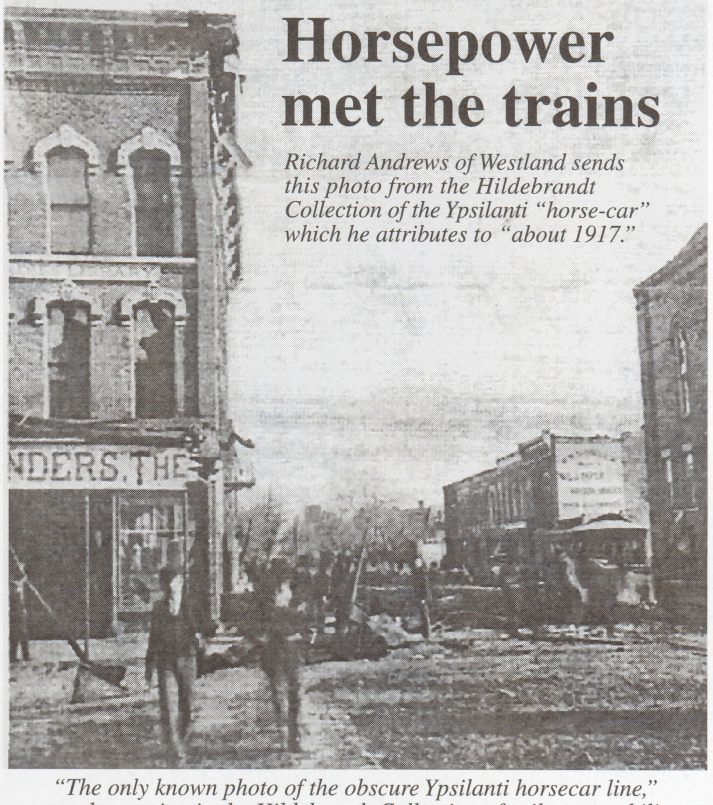
Depot Town Rag

Volume 24, Number 3

A PUBLICATION OF THE DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

Horsepower met the trains

Richard Andrews of Westland sends this photo from the Hildebrandt Collection of the Ypsilanti "horse-car" which he attributes to "about 1917."



"The only known photo of the obscure Ypsilanti horsecar line," says the caption in the Hildebrandt Collection of rail memorabilia. According to Harvey C. Colburn's History of Ypsilanti, *the trolley was "an auxiliary means of local transportation—an odd little horse-car, driven by Reuben Cole, which ran over the tracks between the extreme southern end of Washington Street and the Michigan Central Station." The operator was allowed to keep all receipts collected, and when he died, the line quit.*

Horse and rail cultures converged at the depot

People mostly walked around town when the first train came through here on February 3, 1838. It was travelers and tradesmen who drove their carriages and wagons to the depot. Family buggies were usually for out-of-town excursions to Dixboro, Chelsea, or A^2. Equine-related activity on the block at the depot included liveries, hitching posts, watering troughs, and hand-operated safety gates at the railroad crossing.

Street-side gardens grew better with horse "deposits," too. Hollyhocks and sunflowers lined Cross and River Streets.

Exciting rides like this were not the norm in pre-auto Ypsi. A driver might give his charges free reign on an open stretch in the country but, in town, horse traffic was sedate and stately. At the depot, great concern was shown for horses frightened by the sound and motion of the trains.

"The train is coming!" -Councilmember Murdock

SEMCOG & MDOT's proposed Regional Rail Project may once again connect passenger service between Ann Arbor and Detroit, a 45-mile trip with stops at Ypsilanti, Metropolitan Airport, The Henry Ford, Dearborn, and Detroit's New Center district.

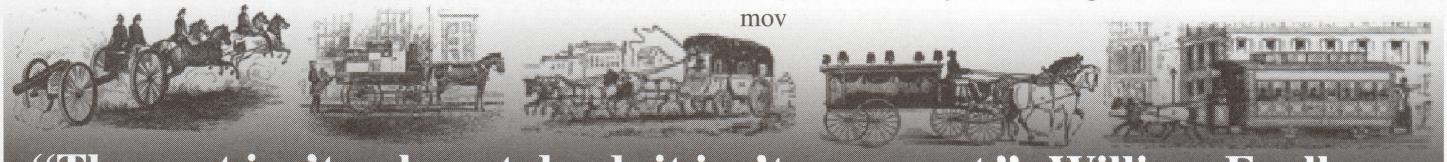
Officials plan four stops a day during the week and three a day on weekends. City Councilmembers Pete Murdock and Brian Robb predict that, if the plan is successful, we may see more stops added and eventually extending on existing rail lines as far as Jackson, Pontiac, and Mt. Clements.

A major portion of Depot Town Association's February meeting discussed which side of the Ypsilanti tracks was best for a 400-foot boarding platform and two bus-stop-style shelters. Day-long parking was the major consideration, with possibilities on either the west side (Freighthouse & Frog Island) and east side (depot & River/Maple Streets). What is left of the original MCRR depot does not meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act and cannot be considered for use as a depot again.

Future rail commuters were reminded of the $500 fine for crossing the tracks other than at the Cross/River Street intersection as anticipated pedestrian traffic to and from trains was reviewed.

Murdock said we could see up to "fifteen trains a day" sometime soon. It's a "real problem—but we like that problem!"

Planners continue talks with Canadian National and Norfolk & Southern railroads. More discussion sessions will be hosted by the City in the next few months and more information can be found on the SEMCOG Website: http://www.semcog.org/uploadedFiles/Programs_and_Projects/Planning/Corridor_Studies/AAtoDetroit.mov



"The past isn't only not dead; it isn't even past." -William Faulkner

-from Sidetrack's collection

Detroit's Goebel Brewery made horse-drawn deliveries to Depot Town as late as 1939.

-Ypsilanti Historical Museum Archives

Every Ypsilanti dairy had its fleet of delivery wagons that plied the neighborhoods

East Side Hose Co. No. 2 at the Thompson Block in Depot Town

[ca. 1910]

-Ypsilanti Historical Museum Archives

When the Preston Ross family came to the depot, trains had been stopping here for 72 years

Ypsilanti Dairy's odd horse was a lesson for all

"Patootie," Ypsilanti Dairy's headless horse brings up the rear. Shy and retiring, he lived an otherwise normal life following the sound of the horse and wagon ahead. His contemporaries marveled at his ability to do this without ears.

Liveries were ubiquitous in Ypsilanti *-James Mann*

Everybody knows Depot Town came about because of the railroad; travelers and freight stopping by on the train created a need for shops and stores near the depot. Although businesses in the neighborhood depended on the trains, horses remained part of daily life for many years. Travelers stepping off the train in the 1800s and early 1900s, either on business or a family visit, needed to get around town as well as the general area. For this reason they needed a horse and perhaps even a carriage. A quick look around and the traveler would see where he could rent what he needed.

Seth Sage lived in Ypsilanti for fifty years and operated a livery and stable on the southeast corner of Cross and River for most of that time. Here a patron could find a good horse and perhaps a carriage to fit his needs. When done with the horse for the day, the patron returned it to the stable where it would be fed and groomed. A horse, like a car, is in need of maintenance. Any other needs, such as shoes and treatment of ills, would be dealt with as well. The Sage livery and stable closed after Seth died in June of 1888. The site is now the home of the Ypsilanti Auto Museum.

Visitors staying at one of the hotels in the neighborhood would find their transportation needs fulfilled there, as no hotel of the 1800s was complete without a stable and livery. A large building stood behind the Follett House into the 1920s where a stable could be found on the first floor. Here a horse and carriage could be rented for the duration of one's stay, or a patron arriving in his own carriage could house it in the shelter of the stable.

On the second floor of the building was the kitchen to the second floor dining room of the hotel, with a walkway extending over the alley. Meals prepared in the kitchen over the stable, were carried over the walkway to the dining room. What effect the stable under the kitchen had on the food is not recorded.

Across the tracks from the depot in the 1890s was Neat's Hotel operated by Thomas Neat and his son Thomas Jr. They ran a livery in connection with the hotel. The Neat Hotel later became the Oliver House, and later the Alibi Bar. At present it is Aubree's Saloon. The current management doses not provide stable or livery services.

Early in the 20th century the horse as a means of transportation was replaced by the automobile and the stable and livery disappeared almost completely from the scene. Once as common as the gas station and car dealership today, stable and liveries are no longer found in Depot Town.

They took the Challenge

Sidetrack won March's 3rd Annual Chili Challenge. Aubree's, Café Luwak, Corner Brewery, Ypsilanti Food Co-op were tough contenders; all their chilis left the taste-testers smiling. 198 people participated.

SOS received $1149 from the benefit, $300 more than last year thanks to donations from Kroger, Eastern Eagle Crest, and each of the Depot Town restaurants.

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They left their mark here

• Cross Street was made wider than most other thoroughfares in the town to permit teams to turn a wagon around mid-block

• Loading doors on many buildings gave access to delivery carts and wagons. Most are covered up today, but broad brick arches still visible on many rear façades.

• Railroad sidings, long ago removed, brought freight cars right to the back doors of both the north and south sides of Cross Street. One of the approaches from the main line is still evident in the parking lot north of the Ypsilanti Food Co-op. Wagon masters were alert to avoid rail traffic.

• Horse and beer lovers still like to tell about the time in the 1980s when the Anheuser-Busch hitch of Clydesdales spent a day in the middle of East Cross Street on exhibit.

Some shop keepers—who could only remember oil slicks on their roads—couldn't figure out what to do with the droppings, but local garden clubbers knew what to do.

Horses and mules brought goods to the rail line

-Photo, discovered on the Internet by Ypsilanti collector Earnie Griffin, to be featured in a future issue on the development of the Freighthouse

Mules wait alongside their wagons as merchandise is delivered to the west doors of the Freighthouse in 1899. Unlike today's trucks, horse-drawn wagons were more easily loaded from the side.

Ypsilanti kept up with demand for horsepower

• The Curtis Carriage Factory, a large two-story brick building, was opened in 1868, and stood on the southwest corner of Michigan Avenue and Adams Street.

• In 1870, O.E. Thompson, a wagon maker since 1856, began the manufacture of carriages, to which he later added various lines of business. His father, Benjamin Thompson, was among Depot Town's pioneers.

• 1910-1923: Among the permanent industries established was the Michigan Crown Fender Company, which began business with the manufacture of a one-piece fender devised by L.C. McLouth, and other autombile parts.

• The Lewis-Geer Company made porch swings, furniture and the famous coaster wagon, the delight of all chidren.

• A significant business development of the times was naturaly in the automobile line. The three sales agencies headed by Joseph F. Thompson, E.G. Wiedman, and T.E.Schaible, handling the Dodge, Ford, and Buick cars, together with several smaller concerns, were to attain an annual business of well over one million dollars, while the community was to keep busy on repair work over fifty skilled mechanics.

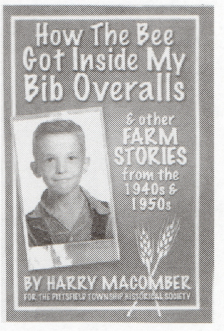
• The Apex Motor Corporation erected a large factory building south of East Michigan Avenue, evolved an elaborate organization and, with large promises to the industrial life of the city, began the manufacture of "Ace" cars. The enterprise, however, was unstable and came to an untimely end.

-Source, Colburn's 1923 Story of Ypsilanti

"Bee Book" recalls switch from horse to tractor

"How The Bee Got Inside My Bib Overalls & Other Farm Stories from the 1940s and 1950s"

Harry Macomber came back to Michigan looking for a place to put the bridles and harnesses his father had used his entire adult life on farms west of Ann Arbor. Reflecting his father's pride in caring for those harnesses all those years, he was looking for a permanent home for the collection. The old barns at Pittsfield Township's Sutherland/Wilson Farmstead Museum seemed the perfect place to preserve and display them for history.



Macomber has vivid memories of a slower paced and caring stewardship of the land when family farms were so vital. Pittsfield folks encouraged him to write enough for this book: tales of his boyhood and tales of making the transition from horsepower to tractors.

The author has offered his book to the Society as a fundraiser for their work on the Farm Museum. The book is available from the Pittsfield Township Historical Society through Macomber's editor (also *The Rag* editor): thomasdodd@comcast.net at $15 per copy.

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W.H. McDermott wasn't ready to concede defeat for his horseshoeing biz even though Ypsilanti Auto Parts had moved in next door

Some folks say they can still see wagons driving up to Ypsi's original drive-in window at the coal yard behind the Sidetrack Bar & Grill

Horses return here for annual "procession"

Ypsilantians love a parade. We take to the streets for Independence Day and Heritage Festival and put on the biggest and most celebratory parades ever seen in the history of the region. But there is no parade on Memorial Day.

On that special day in May, Ypsi's commemoration takes a different form; it's called a "procession." Bands, floats, veterans, and horse units stop on the Cross Street Bridge to hear "taps" played by a bugler, followed by the ceremonial casting of flowers into the Huron River to remember the many soldiers who left Ypsilanti for the wars.

Inspection of the large historical plaques at the west end of the bridge shows the bridge's true name is "Memorial Bridge" dedicated at the end of The Great War with the names of those who gave their lives.

The procession then passes through Depot Town, turns north at the former Civil War barracks —in front of Cass Park where Civil War vets began this tradition—and on up River Street to Highland Cemetery for more commemorative ceremonies.

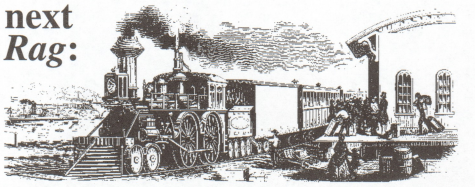
Vets can now salute the flag

For years, Veterans have wanted to salute the U.S. flag during the Pledge of Allegiance and the National Anthem instead of just placing their hand over their heart. Now they can.

A Congressional Amendment sponsored by Senator James Inhofe (R-OK) in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009 specifically states that "members of the Armed Forces and Veterans who are present but not in uniform may render the military salute." Veterans can salute the flag during the National Anthem as well as during "the hoisting, lowering and passing of the flag."

"The salute is a form of honor and respect, representing pride in one's military service," said Inhofe. "Veterans and service members continue representing the military services even when not in uniform. The U.S. Code is now consistent for Veterans and all service members in regards to the symbolic gesture of the military salute."

In the next *Rag*:



Past and future designs on Ypsilanti's venerable—but closed to the public—1878 Freighthouse

Depot Town Rag

"All the news that fits, we print"
A monthly publication of
the Depot Town Association, Inc.
The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

The Depot Town Association, Inc.
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To the editor: thomasdodd@comcast.net
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In what is probably the most reproduced Ypsi photo of the time, most viewers gape at the grand MCRR depot, but closer inspection shows four horse-drawn carriages awaiting passengers across the tracks from the depot

A horse census

Sources: 2005 Study by American Horse Council; Bureau of Land Management; A² News, *KYHORSEPARK.COM*

Once an important form of transportation and essential to agriculture and warfare, horses are now largely used for recreation in the United States.

9,200,000: Horses in the U.S.

3,900,000: Horses used for recreation

2,000,000: Horse owners in the U.S

844,531: Horses used for racing in 2005

In Michigan: 106,625 total equine; 104,949 horses and ponies and 1,676 mules, burros and donkeys in 2002, up 22,211 (27%) from the 82,740 horses and ponies and 1,274 mules, burros and donkeys (84,014 total equine) reported in 1997.

4580: Horses in Washtenaw County on 468 farms (according to the *A² News*, 11 Feb '09), more than any county in the state. Also: more sheep than in any Michigan county.

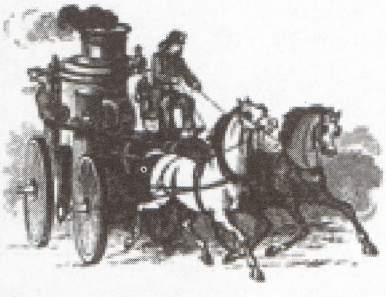
In Ypsilanti's Depot Town: 0 horses in 2009, down from more than 50 in 1909. City ordinance prohibits horses, mules, and donkeys—but we're still arguing about chickens.

46: Percentage of horse owners w/ income is between $25,000 and $75,000 per year.

$101.5 billion: Estimated to be the total impact of the horse industry on GDP.

When the first train arrived here, Ypsilanti already had plenty of HORSEPOWER

Technology has ways of sneaking up on us. Transportation and power meant "horsepower" in our earliest days but, even after the arrival of the railroad it was horse-drawn vehicles that brought passengers and goods to the depot and it was horse-drawn vehicles that carried them away when the trains left.



Horses were the most dependable power source on farms surrounding the city and City Slickers, as well, depended on horsepower for goods, services, and family transportation.

Liveries and stables were commonplace. Some east side alleys remain to remind us of the times when horses were kept behind the house and cows were walked to pastures at the city limits a block away.

The arrival of the railroad depended on horses to bring the community to the depot. Gate tenders at the crossing guard tower were especially alert for teams pulling wagons near Cross and River Streets when they heard an approaching train whistle.

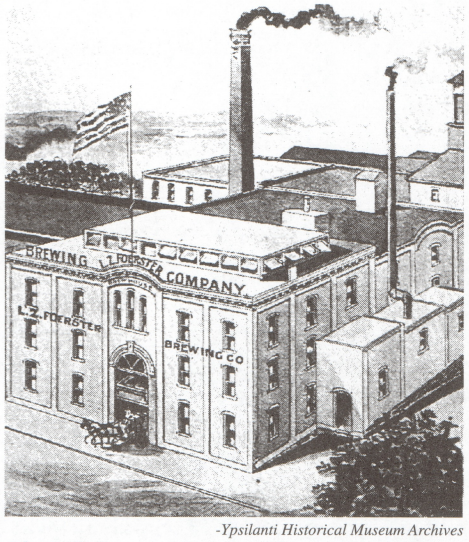
The first fire department in Ypsilanti was organized in 1856 and housed in the Thompson Block on River Street. The big door in the front led through the building to the stables at the rear of the building.

Local tradesmen carried their wares in horse-drawn wagons. Milk, coffee, greens; tinsmiths, knife-sharpeners, fish mongers; all had their products and service in mobile shops that toured every neighborhood of Ypsilanti.

Many of the residents of Highland and St. John's Cemeteries made their last trip there in horse-drawn hearses from the town's funeral parlors.

Signs of a newer technology were evident when Ypsilantians brought their new autos to the Freighthouse for winter storage. These summertime conveyances soon added roofs and side curtains to become year-round transportation. Several local livery stables gradually made the transition into garages and filling stations.

We manage to stay modern in Ypsi.



-Ypsilanti Historical Museum Archives

The L.Z. Foerster Brewing Co. on Grove Street. Horses and wagon are racing out the door with a fresh batch, very likely heading for one of several taverns down by the depot

Was circus horse our most recent equine visitor?

Carolyn McKeever welcomes a member of the Franzen Brothers' Circus in the late 1980s. "We had elephants going down the alley on the north side of Cross Street, and dogs were upset by the sound of lions roaring on Frog Island.

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-Ypsilanti Historical Museum Archives

Thompson's coal wagon pauses at the crux of Cross, River, and the railroad as another wagon comes in from the East Side

Ypsi P.R.I.D.E.: People Restoring Image & Developing the Environment

It's our 15th annual Ypsilanti PRIDE Day!

On Saturday, 16 May, more than a thousand volunteers from our community will be working to improve more than 30 public sites throughout the Ypsilanti area. Following the PRIDE Day clean-up, volunteers will be honored with a celebration in Riverside Park. By donating over three thousand hours of effort and the supplies needed to keep our community beautiful, our volunteers help our businesses thrive by creating an environment that is friendly and inviting. Bring your yard tools out into the street on Ypsilanti PRIDE Day.

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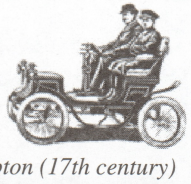
Authentic horsepower was pushed to the side

The Central Railroad, Detroit & St. Joseph Railroad, Michigan Central Railroad, New York Central, Penn Central, Amtrak, Conrail, Norfolk & Southern and other subsequent rail lines across the country helped Americans reverse the meaning of *needs* and *wants* as the demand for more manufactured goods and speedier transportation increased.

"Carriages without horses shall go, And accidents fill the world with woe."
-Attributed to Mother Shipton (17th century)



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